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16 June 1977

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

ETHIOPIA: ASSESSMENT OF KEY ISSUES*

Key Judgments

- Lt. Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam, Chairman of Ethiopia's Provisional Administrative Council, is likely to remain the predominant political figure in Ethiopia for at least the next year.
 - He has eliminated his principal rivals and clamped down harshly on alleged opponents of the regime. Institutions that have traditionally wielded influence have either collapsed or been neutralized.
 - Insurgencies are rampant in parts of the country, but these are unlikely to pose a serious challenge to Mengistu's rule.
- We estimate that the government, even in a loose sense, controls less than two-thirds of the country, but it retains control over the key urban centers, transportation arteries, and vital agricultural areas.
- Significantly increased outside assistance to the insurgencies would improve their prospects, but even this would not be likely to bring Mengistu down.
- As long as Mengistu is in control, he will almost certainly continue to move along an increasingly procommunist track.

* This memorandum was prepared by CIA's Office of Regional and Political Analysis with inputs from the Office of Strategic Research and the Office of Economic Research, and was coordinated within CIA. Questions and comments may be addressed to

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-Assassination would appear to be the most serious threat to Mengistu.

Even if Mengistu were killed or otherwise departed the scene, he would most likely be replaced by a military government with generally similar objectives and outlook.

--Ethiopian dissidents are unlikely to cause the overthrow of the Mengistu regime.

-Apart from the insurgencies in the countryside, the most potent dissident group is the small clandestine Marxist Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party. This group will continue to harry the government, but it lacks the support, particularly within the military, to pose a serious challenge to the regime.

-The Ethiopian Democratic Union, a small moderate insurgent force, presently controls a sizable area in western Ethiopia, but it will probably be pushed back unless it can quickly find foreign sources of arms and money--a development that does not appear likely to occur in time to counter the government's ongoing offensive.

--Eritrea is likely to achieve de facto independence from Ethiopia within the next year.

-The Eritrean insurgents, totalling between 15,000 to 18,000 armed personnel, hold the military initiative, control most of the countryside, and have established rudimentary administrative structure. The two largest insurgent groups have agreed on steps for achieving unity; the third group will probably also go along, and this would limit, at least temporarily, the factional squabbling among the insurgents.

-One significant insurgent victory, particularly against a major government stronghold, could precipitate a rapid deterioration of the government's military position; at present, the insurgents appear to lack the capability to accomplish this, but they are likely in the future to receive increasing assistance, military and financial, from moderate Arab states (particularly Saudi Arabia and Egypt) and possibly Iran.

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-The decisive factor will probably be the morale and loyalty of the Ethiopian military forces, both of which are already questionable.

--Tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia are mounting.

-The dispute over the Ogaden is increasingly likely to lead to conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia.

Somalia is supporting some 5,000-10,000 insurgents in the Ogaden, and these forces, who are accompanied by some regular Somali military personnel, are steadily eroding government control of the countryside.

Somalia would probably prefer to avoid a major commitment of its own troops, but the fear that Ethiopia's success in acquiring foreign arms may tilt the balance in the Ogaden could lead Somali President Siad to move quickly while Ethiopian capabilities are weak. Somalia would also intervene directly in the Ogaden if it were necessary to keep the insurgents from being forced out of Ethiopia.

A conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia would probably be short; neither side could sustain heavy operations for more than a few weeks.

-Ethiopia is also concerned about the upper hand Somalia has obtained in the French Territory of the Afars and Issas (FTAI) as well as by the recent Somali-supported attack on the vital rail link between Addis Ababa and Djibouti.

Both Ethiopia and Somalia are supporting elements in the FTAI, and both have the capability to mount subversion and guerrilla warfare in the area--Somalia more so than Ethiopia.

The prospect of Somalia and the Arabs gaining increased influence in the FTAI, coupled with Ethiopia's declining control in the Ogaden, would over time increase the chances of Ethiopia's making a preemptive strike against Somalia.

--We believe that the moderate Arab states and possibly Iran are prepared to provide the Ethiopian insurgents with increased military and financial assistance.

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-Iraq and Syria have been the most consistent supporters of the Eritrean insurgents, providing both arms and money, while Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates have provided food, medical supplies, and limited financial aid.

-Sudan has permitted arms and supplies for the Eritreans to transit Port Sudan; President Numayri has also allowed Ethiopian Democratic Union insurgents to use Sudanese territory as a base of operations, but Sudan itself has provided only limited amounts of military equipment and financial aid to the dissidents.

-Although important to the insurgents, aid from the Arab states is unlikely to be of the quantity or type that will permit the insurgents to pose an immediate serious threat to the Ethiopian government's strongholds.

--In May, the Soviets reportedly negotiated a \$504-million arms agreement with Ethiopia--the largest Soviet accord with an African country; this raises the total amount of military aid pledged over the past six months by the USSR to Ethiopia to \$640 million, more than double the military aid provided to Somalia over the past decade.

-Over the next two years the Soviets are to provide MIG-21 fighters, helicopters, tanks, Osa-class guided-missile patrol boats, and ammunition. In an effort to camouflage Soviet aid, some of this may go through third countries, such as Libya, which also provides military assistance to Ethiopia.

-Somalia is likely to voice serious objection to such aid, and this may cause the Soviets either to slow down deliveries to Ethiopia or to speed up military aid deliveries to Somalia.

-There is a difference of view within CIA about which way Moscow would opt if forced to make a choice between Ethiopia and Somalia.

Most Soviet analysts believe that the Soviets would not sacrifice their substantial investment and presence in Somalia and would, therefore, greatly reduce their role in Ethiopia.

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Most African analysts believe that the Soviets would opt for Ethiopia as having the greater potential for Soviet objectives in Africa.

--At present, we estimate that there are 60-75 Cuban military personnel in Ethiopia and that this total may grow to about 400-500.

-The Cubans are unlikely to play a combat role; the continuing drain on Cuban resources in Angola will almost certainly preclude a major commitment of combat units.

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